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SHELLEY

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FRANCIS THOMPSON

SHELLEY

BY FRANCIS THOMPSON 1859-1907

With an Introduction
by the R^t Hon^ble
GEORGE WYNDHAM

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
NEW YORK
1910

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TO
THE LADY OF
"LOVE IN DIAN'S LAP"
THIS EDITION OF
FRANCIS THOMPSON'S ESSAY
IS DEDICATED
IN DOUBLE FEALTY
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THE INTRODUCTION

BY GEORGE WYNDHAM

[The following Appreciation is taken from a Letter addressed by Mr Wyndham, after he had read the "Shelley" article in *The Dublin Review*, to the editor of that periodical, Mr Wilfrid Ward. The friends then permitted to read the Letter were inevitably eager to share with others their advantage; and the Literary Executor of Francis Thompson gratefully acknowledges Mr Wyndham's and Mr Ward's good will in granting his request that what was written as a private Letter should here stand in lieu of any more formal Introduction.]

I must now tell you that I have read Francis Thompson's *Shelley* more than once to myself, and once aloud.

For the moment I will say that it is the most important contribution to pure Letters written in English during the last twenty years. In saying that, I compare this Essay in criticism with

Poetry, as well as with other critical Essays.

Speaking from memory, Swinburne's last effective volume, *Astrophel* with the *Nympholept* in it, came out in '87 or '88; Browning's *Asolando* in '87. Tennyson's *Œnone* is also, I think, at the verge of my twenty years. But, even so, these were pale autumn blossoms of more radiant springs. It may be, when posterity judges, that Thompson's own poems alone will overthrow this opinion.

In any case there is a strain in a comparison between criticism and poetry; prose and verse. It is more natural to seek comparison with other essays devoted to the appreciation of poetry. I have a very great regard for Matthew Arnold's *Essays in Criticism*, partly reasoned, partly sentimental. But they were earlier. They did not reach such heights. They do not handle

subjects, as a rule, so pertinent to Poetry. When they do, in the "Wordsworth" and "Byron" (Second Series), they are outclassed by this Essay. The "Heine" essays deal with Religion rather than Poetry. The only recent English Essay on Poetry—and, therefore, life temporal and eternal—which challenges comparison, as I read Thompson's *Shelley*, is Myers's *Virgil*, and specially the First Part.

I think those two are the best English Essays on Poetry, of our day. Myers gains by virtue of Virgil's wider appeal to mortal men in all ages. Thompson gains by virtue of the fact that he is himself a poet, writing on the poet who, in English, appeals specially to poets. His subject is narrower, but his style is incomparable in the very qualities at which Myers aimed; of rhythm and profuse illustration. Both, perhaps, exceeded in

these qualities. But Thompson, the poet, is the better man at varying and castigating his prose style. He is rich and melodic, where Myers is, at moments, sweet and ornate. Both are sentimental; and each speaks out of his own sorrow. Myers sorrowed after confirmation of Immortality. Thompson sorrowed out of sheer misery. When Myers writes of Virgil's "intimations" of Immortality, he is thinking of his own sorrow. When Thompson writes of Mangan's sheer misery, he is thinking of his own Slough of Despond. Both mean to be personally reticent. But Thompson succeeds. Unless I knew Thompson's story, I could not read between the lines of his wailing over Mangan. But anyone who reads Myers sees the blots of *his* tears. Again, Myers is conscious of Virgil as a precursor on the track of unrevealed immortality. Thompson

seems—is, I believe—unconscious of any comparison between himself and Shelley, as angels ascending the iridescent ladders of sunlit imagination. He follows the "Sun-treader" with his eye, unaware that his feet are automatically scaling the Empyrean.

That his article is addressed to Catholics in no way deflects its aim. It begins with an *apologia* for writing on Shelley. It ends with an *apologia for* Shelley. These are but the grey goose-feathers that speed it to the universal heart of man. There it is pinned and quivers.

The older I get, the more do I affect the two extremes of literature. Let me have either pure Poetry, or else the statements of actors and sufferers. Thompson's article, though an Essay in prose criticism, is pure Poetry, and also, unconsciously, a human document of intense suffering. But I won't pity him. He scaled the heavens because he

had to sing, and so dropped in a niche above the portals of the temple of Fame. And little enough would he care for that! Why should he? Myers doubted. But Thompson knew that souls, not only of poets but of saints, "beacon from the abode where the eternal are." He is a meteor exhaled from the miasma of mire; and all meteors, earth-born and Heaven-fallen, help the Heavens to declare the glory of GOD. *Coeli enarrant.* But the grammar of their speech is the large utterance of such men made "splendid with swords."

GEORGE WYNDHAM.

Saighton Grange, Chester,
September 16, 1908.

SHELLEY

BY FRANCIS THOMPSON

THE Church, which was once the mother of poets no less than of saints, during the last two centuries has relinquished to aliens the chief glories of poetry, if the chief glories of holiness she has preserved for her own. The palm and the laurel, Dominic and Dante, sanctity and song, grew together in her soil: she has retained the palm, but forgone the laurel. Poetry in its widest sense,* and when not professedly irreligious, has been too much and too long among many Catholics either misprised or distrusted; too much and too generally the feeling has

*That is to say, taken as the general animating spirit of the Fine Arts.

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been that it is at best superfluous, at worst pernicious, most often dangerous. Once poetry was, as she should be, the lesser sister and helpmate of the Church; the minister to the mind, as the Church to the soul. But poetry sinned, poetry fell; and, in place of lovingly reclaiming her, Catholicism cast her from the door to follow the feet of her pagan seducer. The separation has been ill for poetry; it has not been well for religion.

Fathers of the Church (we would say), pastors of the Church, pious laics of the Church: you are taking from its walls the panoply of Aquinas; take also from its walls the psaltery of Alighieri. Unroll the precedents of the Church's past; recall to your minds that Francis of Assisi was among the precursors of Dante; that sworn to Poverty he forswore not Beauty, but discerned through the lamp Beauty the Light

God; that he was even more a poet in his miracles than in his melody; that poetry clung round the cowls of his Order. Follow his footsteps; you who have blessings for men, have you no blessing for the birds? Recall to your memory that, in their minor kind, the love poems of Dante shed no less honour on Catholicism than did the great religious poem which is itself pivoted on love; that in singing of heaven he sang of Beatrice—this supporting angel was still carven on his harp even when he stirred its strings in Paradise. What you theoretically know, vividly realize: that with many the religion of beauty must always be a passion and a power, that it is only evil when divorced from the worship of the Primal Beauty. Poetry is the preacher to men of the earthly as you of the Heavenly Fairness; of that earthly fairness which God has fashioned to his own image and

likeness. You proclaim the day which the Lord has made, and she exults and rejoices in it. You praise the Creator for His works, and she shows you that they are very good. Beware how you misprise this potent ally, for hers is the art of Giotto and Dante: beware how you misprise this insidious foe, for hers is the art of modern France and of Byron. Her value, if you know it not, God knows, and know the enemies of God. If you have no room for her beneath the wings of the Holy One, there is place for her beneath the webs of the Evil One: whom you discard, he embraces; whom you cast down from an honourable seat, he will advance to a haughty throne; the brows you dislaurel of a just respect, he will bind with baleful splendours; the stone which you builders reject, he will make his head of the corner. May she not prophesy in the temple? then there is

ready for her the tripod of Delphi. Eye her not askance if she seldom sing directly of religion: the bird gives glory to God though it sings only of its innocent loves. Suspicion creates its own cause; distrust begets reason for distrust. This beautiful, wild, feline poetry, wild because left to range the wilds, restore to the hearth of your charity, shelter under the rafter of your Faith; discipline her to the sweet restraints of your household, feed her with the meat from your table, soften her with the amity of your children; tame her, fondle her, cherish her—you will no longer then need to flee her. Suffer her to wanton, suffer her to play, so she play round the foot of the Cross!

There is a change of late years: the Wanderer is being called to her Father's house, but we would have the call yet louder, we would have the

proffered welcome more unstinted. There are still stray remnants of the old intolerant distrust. It is still possible for even a French historian of the Church to enumerate among the articles cast upon Savonarola's famous pile, *poésies érotiques, tant des anciens que des modernes, livres impies ou corrupteurs, Ovide, Tibulle, Properce, pour ne nommer que les plus connus, Dante, Pétrarque, Boccace, tous ces auteurs Italiens qui déjà souillaient les âmes et ruinaient les mœurs, en créant ou perfectionnant la langue.** Blameworthy carelessness, at the least, which can class the *Vita Nuova* with the *Ars Amandi* and the *Decameron!* And among many English Catholics the spirit of poetry is still often received with a restricted, Puritanical greeting rather than with the traditionally Catholic joyous openness.

*The Abbé Bareille was not, of course, responsible for Savonarola's taste, only for thus endorsing it.

We ask, therefore, for a larger interest, not in purely Catholic poetry, but in poetry generally, poetry in its widest sense. With few exceptions, whatsoever in our best poets is great and good to the non-Catholic, is great and good also to the Catholic; and though Faber threw his edition of Shelley into the fire and never regretted the act; though, moreover, Shelley is so little read among us that we can still tolerate in our Churches the religious parody which Faber should have thrown after his three-volumed Shelley;*—in spite of this, we are not disposed to number among such exceptions that straying spirit of light.

We have among us at the present day no lineal descendant, in the poeti-

* We mean, of course, the hymn, "I rise from dreams of time."

cal order, of Shelley; and any such offspring of the aboundingly spontaneous Shelley is hardly possible, still less likely, on account of the defect by which (we think) contemporary poetry in general, as compared with the poetry of the early nineteenth century, is mildewed. That defect is the predominance of art over inspiration, of body over soul. We do not say the *defect* of inspiration. The warrior is there, but he is hampered by his armour. Writers of high aim in all branches of literature, even when they are not—as Mr Swinburne, for instance, is—lavish in expression, are generally over-deliberate in expression. Mr Henry James, delineating a fictitious writer clearly intended to be the ideal of an artist, makes him regret that he has sometimes allowed himself to take the second-best word instead of searching for the best. Theoretically, of course, one ought always to try for

the best word. But practically, the habit of excessive care in word-selection frequently results in loss of spontaneity; and, still worse, the habit of always taking the best word too easily becomes the habit of always taking the most ornate word, the word most removed from ordinary speech. In consequence of this, poetic diction has become latterly a kaleidoscope, and one's chief curiosity is as to the precise combinations into which the pieces will be shifted. There is, in fact, a certain band of words, the Prætorian cohorts of poetry, whose prescriptive aid is invoked by every aspirant to the poetical purple, and without whose prescriptive aid none dares aspire to the poetical purple; against these it is time some banner should be raised. Perhaps it is almost impossible for a contemporary writer quite to evade the services of the free-lances whom one encounters

under so many standards.* But it is at any rate curious to note that the literary revolution against the despotic diction of Pope seems issuing, like political revolutions, in a despotism of its own making.

This, then, we cannot but think, distinguishes the literary period of Shelley from our own. It distinguishes even the unquestionable treasures and masterpieces of to-day from similar treasures and masterpieces of the precedent day; even the *Lotus-Eaters* from

* We are a little surprised at the fact, because so many Victorian poets are, or have been, prose-writers as well. Now, according to our theory, the practice of prose should maintain fresh and comprehensive a poet's diction, should save him from falling into the hands of an exclusive coterie of poetic words. It should react upon his metrical vocabulary to its beneficial expansion, by taking him outside his aristocratic circle of language, and keeping him in touch with the great commonalty, the proletariat of speech. For it is with words as with men: constant intermarriage within the limits of a patrician clan begets effete refinement; and to reinvigorate the stock, its veins must be replenished from hardy plebeian blood.

Kubla-Khan; even Rossetti's ballads from *Christabel*. It is present in the restraint of Matthew Arnold no less than in the exuberance of Swinburne, and affects our writers who aim at simplicity no less than those who seek richness. Indeed, nothing is so artificial as our simplicity. It is the simplicity of the French stage *ingénue*. We are self-conscious to the finger-tips; and this inherent quality, entailing on our poetry the inevitable loss of spontaneity, ensures that whatever poets, of whatever excellence, may be born to us from the Shelleian stock, its founder's spirit can take among us no reincarnation. An age that is ceasing to produce child-like children cannot produce a Shelley. For both as poet and man he was essentially a child.

Yet, just as in the effete French society before the Revolution the Queen played at Arcadia, the King

played at being a mechanic, every one played at simplicity and universal philanthropy, leaving for most durable outcome of their philanthropy the guillotine, as the most durable outcome of ours may be execution by electricity;—so in our own society the talk of benevolence and the cult of childhood are the very fashion of the hour. We, of this self-conscious, incredulous generation, sentimentalize our children, analyse our children, think we are endowed with a special capacity to sympathize and identify ourselves with children; we play at being children. And the result is that we are not more child-like, but our children are less child-like. It is so tiring to stoop to the child, so much easier to lift the child up to you. Know you what it is to be a child? It is to be something very different from the man of to-day. It is to have a spirit yet streaming from the waters of

baptism; it is to believe in love, to believe in loveliness, to believe in belief; it is to be so little that the elves can reach to whisper in your ear; it is to turn pumpkins into coaches, and mice into horses, lowness into loftiness, and nothing into everything, for each child has its fairy godmother in its own soul; it is to live in a nutshell and to count yourself the king of infinite space; it is

> To see a world in a grain of sand,
> And a heaven in a wild flower,
> Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
> And eternity in an hour;

it is to know not as yet that you are under sentence of life, nor petition that it be commuted into death. When we become conscious in dreaming that we dream, the dream is on the point of breaking; when we become conscious in living that we live, the ill dream is but just beginning. Now if Shelley was but too conscious of the dream,

in other respects Dryden's false and famous line might have been applied to him with very much less than its usual untruth.* To the last, in a degree uncommon even among poets, he retained the idiosyncrasy of childhood, expanded and matured without differentiation. To the last he was the enchanted child.

This was, as is well known, patent in his life. It is as really, though perhaps less obviously, manifest in his poetry, the sincere effluence of his life. And it may not, therefore, be amiss to consider whether it was conditioned by anything beyond his congenital nature. For our part, we believe it to have been equally largely the outcome of his early and long isolation. Men given to retirement and abstract study are notori-

* Wordsworth's adaptation of it, however, is true. Men are not "children of a larger growth," but the child *is* father of the man, since the parent is only partially reproduced in his offspring.

ously liable to contract a certain degree of childlikeness: and if this be the case when we segregate a man, how much more when we segregate a child! It is when they are taken into the solution of school-life that children, by the reciprocal interchange of influence with their fellows, undergo the series of reactions which converts them from children into boys and from boys into men. The intermediate stage must be traversed to reach the final one.

Now Shelley never could have been a man, for he never was a boy. And the reason lay in the persecution which overclouded his schooldays. Of that persecution's effect upon him he has left us, in *The Revolt of Islam*, a picture which to many or most people very probably seems a poetical exaggeration; partly because Shelley appears to have escaped physical brutality, partly because adults are inclined to

smile tenderly at childish sorrows which are not caused by physical suffering. That he escaped for the most part bodily violence is nothing to the purpose. It is the petty malignant annoyance recurring hour by hour, day by day, month by month, until its accumulation becomes an agony; it is this which is the most terrible weapon that boys have against their fellow boy, who is powerless to shun it because, unlike the man, he has virtually no privacy. His is the torture which the ancients used, when they anointed their victim with honey and exposed him naked to the restless fever of the flies. He is a little St Sebastian, sinking under the incessant flight of shafts which skilfully avoid the vital parts.

We do not, therefore, suspect Shelley of exaggeration: he was, no doubt, in terrible misery. Those who think otherwise must forget their own past.

Most people, we suppose, *must* forget what they were like when they were children: otherwise they would know that the griefs of their childhood were passionate abandonment, *déchirants* (to use a characteristically favourite phrase of modern French literature) as the griefs of their maturity. Children's griefs are little, certainly; but so is the child, so is its endurance, so is its field of vision, while its nervous impressionability is keener than ours. Grief is a matter of relativity; the sorrow should be estimated by its proportion to the sorrower; a gash is as painful to one as an amputation to another. Pour a puddle into a thimble, or an Atlantic into Etna; both thimble and mountain overflow. Adult fools! would not the angels smile at *our* griefs, were not angels too wise to smile at them?

So beset, the child fled into the tower of his own soul, and raised the draw-

bridge. He threw out a reserve, encysted in which he grew to maturity unaffected by the intercourses that modify the maturity of others into the thing we call a man. The encysted child developed until it reached years of virility, until those later Oxford days in which Hogg encountered it; then, bursting at once from its cyst and the university, it swam into a world not illegitimately perplexed by such a whim of the gods. It was, of course, only the completeness and duration of this seclusion—lasting from the gate of boyhood to the threshold of youth—which was peculiar to Shelley. Most poets, probably, like most saints, are prepared for their mission by an initial segregation, as the seed is buried to germinate: before they can utter the oracle of poetry, they must first be divided from the body of men. It is the severed head that makes the seraph.

Shelley's life frequently exhibits in him the magnified child. It is seen in his fondness for apparently futile amusements, such as the sailing of paper boats. This was, in the truest sense of the word, child-like; not, as it is frequently called and considered, child-ish. That is to say, it was not a mindless triviality, but the genuine child's power of investing little things with imaginative interest; the same power, though differently devoted, which produced much of his poetry. Very possibly in the paper boat he saw the magic bark of Laon and Cythna, or

> That thinnest boat
> On which the mother of the months is borne
> By ebbing night into her lunar cave.

In fact, if you mark how favourite an idea, under varying forms, is this in his verse, you will perceive that all the charmed boats which glide down the stream of his poetry are but glorified

resurrections of the little paper argosies which trembled down the Isis.

And the child appeared no less often in Shelley the philosopher than in Shelley the idler. It is seen in his repellent no less than in his amiable weaknesses; in the unteachable folly of a love that made its goal its starting-point, and firmly expected spiritual rest from each new divinity, though it had found none from the divinities antecedent. For we are clear that this was no mere straying of sensual appetite, but a straying, strange and deplorable, of the spirit; that (contrary to what Mr Coventry Patmore has said) he left a woman not because he was tired of her arms, but because he was tired of her soul. When he found Mary Shelley wanting, he seems to have fallen into the mistake of Wordsworth, who complained in a charming piece of unreasonableness that his wife's

love, which had been a fountain, was now only a well:

> Such change, and at the very door
> Of my fond heart, hath made me poor.

Wordsworth probably learned, what Shelley was incapable of learning, that love can never permanently be a fountain. A living poet, in an article* which you almost fear to breathe upon lest you should flutter some of the frail pastel-like bloom, has said the thing: "Love itself has tidal moments, lapses and flows due to the metrical rule of the interior heart." Elementary reason should proclaim this true. Love is an affection, its display an emotion: love is the air, its display is the wind. An affection may be constant; an emotion can no more be constant than the wind can constantly blow. All, therefore, that a man can reasonably ask of his wife is that her love should be indeed a well.

* *The Rhythm of Life*, by Alice Meynell.

A well; but a Bethesda-well, into which from time to time the angel of tenderness descends to trouble the waters for the healing of the beloved. Such a love Shelley's second wife appears unquestionably to have given him. Nay, she was content that he should veer while she remained true; she companioned him intellectually, shared his views, entered into his aspirations, and yet—yet, even at the date of *Epipsychidion*, the foolish child, her husband, assigned her the part of moon to Emilia Viviani's sun, and lamented that he was barred from final, certain, irreversible happiness by a cold and callous society. Yet few poets were so mated before, and no poet was so mated afterwards, until Browning stooped and picked up a fair-coined soul that lay rusting in a pool of tears.

In truth, his very unhappiness and discontent with life, in so far as it was not the inevitable penalty of the ethical

anarch, can only be ascribed to this same childlike irrationality—though in such a form it is irrationality hardly peculiar to Shelley. Pity, if you will, his spiritual ruins, and the neglected early training which was largely their cause; but the pity due to his outward circumstances has been strangely exaggerated. The obloquy from which he suffered he deliberately and wantonly courted. For the rest, his lot was one that many a young poet might envy. He had faithful friends, a faithful wife, an income small but assured. Poverty never dictated to his pen; the designs on his bright imagination were never etched by the sharp fumes of necessity.

If, as has chanced to others—as chanced, for example, to Mangan—outcast from home, health and hope, with a charred past and a bleared future, an anchorite without detachment and self-cloistered without self-sufficingness,

deposed from a world which he had not abdicated, pierced with thorns which formed no crown, a poet hopeless of the bays, and a martyr hopeless of the palm, a land cursed against the dews of love, an exile banned and proscribed even from the innocent arms of childhood —he were burning helpless at the stake of his unquenchable heart, then he might have been inconsolable, then might he have cast the gorge at life, then have cowered in the darkening chamber of his being, tapestried with mouldering hopes, and hearkened to the winds that swept across the illimitable wastes of death. But no such hapless lot was Shelley's as that of his own contemporaries—Keats, half-chewed in the jaws of London and spit dying on to Italy; De Quincey, who, if he escaped, escaped rent and maimed from those cruel jaws; Coleridge, whom they dully mumbled for the major portion of his

life. Shelley had competence, poetry, love; yet he wailed that he could lie down like a tired child and weep away his life of care! Is it ever so with you, sad brother; is it ever so with me? and is there no drinking of pearls except they be dissolved in biting tears? "Which of us has his desire, or having it is satisfied?"

It is true that he shared the fate of nearly all the great poets contemporary with him, in being unappreciated. Like them, he suffered from critics who were for ever shearing the wild tresses of poetry between rusty rules, who could never see a literary bough project beyond the trim level of its day but they must lop it with a crooked criticism, who kept indomitably planting in the defile of fame the "established canons" that had been spiked by poet after poet. But we decline to believe that a singer of Shelley's calibre could be seriously grieved by want of

vogue. Not that we suppose him to have found consolation in that senseless superstition, "the applause of posterity." Posterity, posterity! which goes to Rome, weeps large-sized tears, carves beautiful inscriptions, over the tomb of Keats; and the worm must wriggle her curtsey to it all, since the dead boy, wherever he be, has quite other gear to tend. Never a bone less dry for all the tears!

A poet must to some extent be a chameleon, and feed on air. But it need not be the musty breath of the multitude. He can find his needful support in the judgement of those whose judgement he knows valuable, and such support Shelley had:

> La gloire
> Ne compte pas toujours les voix;
> Elle les pèse quelquefois.

Yet if this might be needful to him as support, neither this, nor the applau e

of the present, nor the applause of posterity, could have been needful to him as motive: the one all-sufficing motive for a great poet's singing is that expressed by Keats:

> I was taught in Paradise
> To ease my breast of melodies.

Precisely so. The overcharged breast can find no ease but in suckling the baby-song. No enmity of outward circumstances, therefore, but his own nature, was responsible for Shelley's doom.

A being with so much about it of childlike unreasonableness, and yet withal so much of the beautiful attraction luminous in a child's sweet unreasonableness, would seem fore-fated by its very essence to the transience of the bubble and the rainbow, of all things filmy and fair. Did some shadow of this destiny bear part in his sadness? Certain it is that, by a curious

chance, he himself in *Julian and Maddalo* jestingly foretold the manner of his end. "O ho! You talk as in years past," said Maddalo (Byron) to Julian (Shelley); "If you can't swim, Beware of Providence." Did no unearthly *dixisti* sound in his ears as he wrote it? But a brief while, and Shelley, who could not swim, was weltering on the waters of Lerici. We know not how this may affect others, but over us it is a coincidence which has long tyrannized with an absorbing inveteracy of impression (strengthened rather than diminished by the contrast between the levity of the utterance and its fatal fulfilment)—thus to behold, heralding itself in warning mockery through the very lips of its predestined victim, the Doom upon whose breath his locks were lifting along the coasts of Campania. The death which he had prophesied came upon him, and Spez-

zia enrolled another name among the mournful Marcelli of our tongue; Venetian glasses which foamed and burst before the poisoned wine of life had risen to their brims.

Coming to Shelley's poetry, we peep over the wild mask of revolutionary metaphysics, and we see the winsome face of the child. Perhaps none of his poems is more purely and typically Shelleian than *The Cloud*, and it is interesting to note how essentially it springs from the faculty of make-believe. The same thing is conspicuous, though less purely conspicuous, throughout his singing; it is the child's faculty of make-believe raised to the n^{th} power. He is still at play, save only that his play is such as manhood stops to watch, and his playthings are those which the gods give their children. The universe is his box of toys. He

dabbles his fingers in the day-fall. He is gold-dusty with tumbling amidst the stars. He makes bright mischief with the moon. The meteors nuzzle their noses in his hand. He teases into growling the kennelled thunder, and laughs at the shaking of its fiery chain. He dances in and out of the gates of heaven: its floor is littered with his broken fancies. He runs wild over the fields of ether. He chases the rolling world. He gets between the feet of the horses of the sun. He stands in the lap of patient Nature, and twines her loosened tresses after a hundred wilful fashions, to see how she will look nicest in his song.

This it was which, in spite of his essentially modern character as a singer, qualified Shelley to be the poet of *Prometheus Unbound*, for it made him, in the truest sense of the word, a mythological poet. This childlike

quality assimilated him to the childlike peoples among whom mythologies have their rise. Those Nature myths which, according to many, are the basis of all mythology, are likewise the very basis of Shelley's poetry. The lark that is the gossip of heaven, the winds that pluck the grey from the beards of the billows, the clouds that are snorted from the sea's broad nostril, all the elemental spirits of Nature, take from his verse perpetual incarnation and reincarnation, pass in a thousand glorious transmigrations through the radiant forms of his imagery.

Thus, but not in the Wordsworthian sense, he is a veritable poet of Nature. For with Nature the Wordsworthians will admit no tampering: they exact the direct interpretative reproduction of her; that the poet should follow her as a mistress, not use her as a handmaid. To such following of Nature, Shelley

felt no call. He saw in her not a picture set for his copying, but a palette set for his brush; not a habitation prepared for his inhabiting, but a Coliseum whence he might quarry stones for his own palaces. Even in his descriptive passages the dream-character of his scenery is notorious; it is not the clear, recognizable scenery of Wordsworth, but a landscape that hovers athwart the heat and haze arising from his crackling fantasies. The materials for such visionary Edens have evidently been accumulated from direct experience, but they are recomposed by him into such scenes as never mortal eye beheld. "Don't you wish you had?" as Turner said. The one justification for classing Shelley with the Lake poet is that he loved Nature with a love even more passionate, though perhaps less profound. Wordsworth's *Nightingale and Stockdove* sums up the

contrast between the two, as though it had been written for such a purpose. Shelley is the "creature of ebullient heart," who

> Sings as if the god of wine
> Had helped him to a valentine.

Wordsworth's is the

> —Love with quiet blending,
> Slow to begin and never ending,

the "serious faith and inward glee."

But if Shelley, instead of culling Nature, crossed with its pollen the blossoms of his own soul, that Babylonian garden is his marvellous and best apology. For astounding figurative opulence he yields only to Shakespeare, and even to Shakespeare not in absolute fecundity but in range of images. The sources of his figurative wealth are specialized, while the sources of Shakespeare's are universal. It would have been as conscious an effort for

him to speak without figure as it is for most men to speak with figure. Suspended in the dripping well of his imagination the commonest object becomes encrusted with imagery. Herein again he deviates from the true Nature poet, the normal Wordsworth type of Nature poet: imagery was to him not a mere means of expression, not even a mere means of adornment; it was a delight for its own sake.

And herein we find the trail by which we would classify him. He belongs to a school of which not impossibly he may hardly have read a line—the Metaphysical School. To a large extent, he *is* what the Metaphysical School should have been. That school was a certain kind of poetry trying for a range. Shelley is the range found. Crashaw and Shelley sprang from the same seed; but in the one case the seed was choked with thorns, in the other case it fell

on good ground. The Metaphysical School was in its direct results an abortive movement, though indirectly much came of it—for Dryden came of it. Dryden, to a greater extent than is (we imagine) generally perceived, was Cowley systematized; and Cowley, who sank into the arms of Dryden, rose from the lap of Donne.

But the movement was so abortive that few will thank us for connecting with it the name of Shelley. This is because to most people the Metaphysical School means Donne, whereas it ought to mean Crashaw. We judge the direction of a development by its highest form, though that form may have been produced but once, and produced imperfectly. Now the highest product of the Metaphysical School was Crashaw, and Crashaw was a Shelley *manqué;* he never reached the Promised Land, but he had fervid

visions of it. The Metaphysical School, like Shelley, loved imagery for its own sake: and how beautiful a thing the frank toying with imagery may be, let *The Skylark* and *The Cloud* witness. It is only evil when the poet, on the straight way to a fixed object, lags continually from the path to play. This is commendable neither in poet nor errand-boy. The Metaphysical School failed, not because it toyed with imagery, but because it toyed with it frostily. To sport with the tangles of Neæra's hair may be trivial idleness or caressing tenderness, exactly as your relation to Neæra is that of heartless gallantry or of love. So you may toy with imagery in mere intellectual ingenuity, and then you might as well go write acrostics: or you may toy with it in raptures, and then you may write a *Sensitive Plant*. In fact, the Metaphysical poets when they

went astray cannot be said to have done anything so dainty as is implied by *toying* with imagery. They cut it into shapes with a pair of scissors. From all such danger Shelley was saved by his passionate spontaneity; no trappings are too splendid for the swift steeds of sunrise. His sword-hilt may be rough with jewels, but it is the hilt of an Excalibur. His thoughts scorch through all the folds of expression. His cloth of gold bursts at the flexures, and shows the naked poetry.

It is this gift of not merely embodying but apprehending everything in figure which co-operates towards creating one of his rarest characteristics, so almost preternaturally developed in no other poet, namely, his well-known power to condense the most hydrogenic abstraction. Science can now educe threads of such exquisite tenuity

that only the feet of the tiniest infant-spiders can ascend them; but up the filmiest insubstantiality Shelley runs with agile ease. To him, in truth, nothing is abstract. The dustiest abstractions

> Start, and tremble under his feet,
> And blossom in purple and red.

The coldest moon of an idea rises haloed through his vaporous imagination. The dimmest-sparked chip of a conception blazes and scintillates in the subtile oxygen of his mind. The most wrinkled Æson of an abstruseness leaps rosy out of his bubbling genius. In a more intensified signification than it is probable that Shakespeare dreamed of, Shelley gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name. Here afresh he touches the Metaphysical School, whose very title was drawn from this habitual pursuit of abstractions, and who failed in that pursuit from the

one cause omnipresent with them, because in all their poetic smithy they had left never a place for a forge. They laid their fancies chill on the anvil. Crashaw, indeed, partially anticipated Shelley's success, and yet further did a later poet, so much further that we find it difficult to understand why a generation that worships Shelley should be reviving Gray, yet almost forget the name of Collins. The generality of readers, when they know him at all, usually know him by his *Ode on the Passions*. In this, despite its beauty, there is still a *soupçon* of formalism, a lingering trace of powder from the eighteenth-century periwig, dimming the bright locks of poetry. Only the literary student reads that little masterpiece, the *Ode to Evening*, which sometimes heralds the Shelleian strain, while other passages are the sole things in the language comparable to the miniatures of

Il Penseroso. Crashaw, Collins, Shelley —three ricochets of the one pebble, three jets from three bounds of the one Pegasus! Collins's Pity, "with eyes of dewy light," is near of kin to Shelley's Sleep, "the filmy-eyed"; and the "shadowy tribes of mind" are the lineal progenitors of "Thought's crowned powers." This, however, is personification, wherein both Collins and Shelley build on Spenser: the dizzying achievement to which the modern poet carried personification accounts for but a moiety, if a large moiety, of his vivifying power over abstractions. Take the passage (already alluded to) in that glorious chorus telling how the Hours come

> From the temples high
> Of man's ear and eye
> Roofed over Sculpture and Poetry,
> From the skiey towers
> Where Thought's crowned powers
> Sit watching your flight, ye happy Hours.

Our feet now, every palm,
Are sandalled with calm,
And the dew of our wings is a rain of balm;
And within our eyes
The human love lies
Which makes all it gazes on Paradise.

Any partial explanation will break in our hands before it reaches the root of such a power. The root, we take it, is this. He had an instinctive perception (immense in range and fertility, astonishing for its delicate intuition) of the underlying analogies, the secret subterranean passages, between matter and soul; the chromatic scales, whereat we dimly guess, by which the Almighty modulates through all the keys of creation. Because, the more we consider it, the more likely does it appear that Nature is but an imperfect actress, whose constant changes of dress never change her manner and method, who is the same in all her parts.

To Shelley's ethereal vision the most

rarified mental or spiritual music traced its beautiful corresponding forms on the sand of outward things. He stood thus at the very junction-lines of the visible and invisible, and could shift the points as he willed. His thoughts became a mounted infantry, passing with baffling swiftness from horse to foot or foot to horse. He could express as he listed the material and the immaterial in terms of each other. Never has a poet in the past rivalled him as regards this gift, and hardly will any poet rival him as regards it in the future: men are like first to see the promised doom lay its hand on the tree of heaven and shake down the golden leaves.*

The finest specimens of this faculty are probably to be sought in that Shelleian treasury, *Prometheus Unbound*. It is unquestionably the greatest and

*"And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig-tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind" (Rev. vi, 13).

most prodigal exhibition of Shelley's powers, this amazing lyric world, where immortal clarities sigh past in the perfumes of the blossoms, populate the breathings of the breeze, throng and twinkle in the leaves that twirl upon the bough; where the very grass is all a-rustle with lovely spirit-things, and a weeping mist of music fills the air. The final scenes especially are such a Bacchic reel and rout and revelry of beauty as leaves one staggered and giddy; poetry is spilt like wine, music runs to drunken waste. The choruses sweep down the wind, tirelessly, flight after flight, till the breathless soul almost cries for respite from the unrolling splendours. Yet these scenes, so wonderful from a purely poetical standpoint that no one could wish them away, are (to our humble thinking) nevertheless the artistic error of the poem. Abstractedly, the development

of Shelley's idea required that he should show the earthly paradise which was to follow the fall of Zeus. But dramatically with that fall the action ceases, and the drama should have ceased with it. A final chorus, or choral series, of rejoicings (such as does ultimately end the drama where Prometheus appears on the scene) would have been legitimate enough. Instead, however, the bewildered reader finds the drama unfolding itself through scene after scene which leaves the action precisely where it found it, because there is no longer an action to advance. It is as if the choral *finale* of an opera were prolonged through two acts.

We have, nevertheless, called *Prometheus* Shelley's greatest poem because it is the most comprehensive storehouse of his power. Were we asked to name the most *perfect* among his longer efforts, we should name the poem in which he

lamented Keats; under the shed petals of his lovely fancy giving the slain bird a silken burial. Seldom is the death of a poet mourned in true poetry. Not often is the singer coffined in laurel-wood. Among the very few exceptions to such a rule, the greatest is *Adonais*. In the English language only *Lycidas* competes with it; and when we prefer *Adonais* to *Lycidas*, we are following the precedent set in the case of Cicero: *Adonais* is the longer. As regards command over abstraction, it is no less characteristically Shelleian than *Prometheus*. It is throughout a series of abstractions vitalized with daring exquisiteness, from

> Morning sought
> Her eastern watch-tower, and her hair unbound,
> Wet with the tears which should adorn the ground,
> Dimmed the aerial eyes that kindle day,

to the Dreams that were the flock of the dead shepherd,

> Whom near the streams
> Of his young spirit he kept;

of whom one sees, as she hangs mourning over him,

Upon the silken fringe of his fair eyes
A tear some Dream has loosened from his brain!
Lost angel of a ruined Paradise!
She knew not 'twas her own, as with no stain
She faded like a cloud that hath outwept its rain.

In the solar spectrum, beyond the extreme red and extreme violet rays, are whole series of colours, demonstrable, but imperceptible to gross human vision. Such writing as this we have quoted renders visible the invisibilities of imaginative colour.

One thing prevents *Adonais* from being ideally perfect: its lack of Christian hope. Yet we remember well the writer of a popular memoir on Keats proposing as "the best consolation for the mind pained by this sad record" Shelley's inexpressibly sad exposition of Pantheistic immortality:

He is a portion of that loveliness
Which once he made more lovely, etc.

What utter desolation can it be that discerns comfort in this hope, whose wan countenance is as the countenance of a despair? Nay, was not indeed *wanhope* the Saxon for despair? What deepest depth of agony is it that finds consolation in this immortality: an immortality which thrusts you into death, the maw of Nature, that your dissolved elements may circulate through her veins?

Yet such, the poet tells me, is my sole balm for the hurts of life. I am as the vocal breath floating from an organ. I too shall fade on the winds, a cadence soon forgotten. So I dissolve and die, and am lost in the ears of men: the particles of my being twine in newer melodies, and from my one death arise a hundred lives. Why, through the thin partition of this consolation Pantheism can hear the groans of its neighbour, Pessimism. Better almost the black resignation which the fatalist draws

from his own hopelessness, from the fierce kisses of misery that hiss against his tears.

With some gleams, it is true, of more than mock solace, *Adonais* is lighted; but they are obtained by implicitly assuming the personal immortality which the poem explicitly denies; as when, for instance, to greet the dead youth,

> The inheritors of unfulfilled renown
> Rose from their seats, built beyond mortal thought
> Far in the unapparent.

And again the final stanza of the poem:

> The breath whose might I have invoked in song
> Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven
> Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng
> Whose sails were never to the tempest given:
> The massy earth, the sphered skies are riven;
> I am borne darkly, fearfully afar,
> Where, burning through the inmost veil of heaven,
> The soul of Adonais like a star
> Beacons from the abode where the eternal are.

The soul of Adonais?—Adonais, who is but

> A portion of that loveliness
> Which once he made more lovely.

After all, to finish where we began, perhaps the poems on which the lover of Shelley leans most lovingly, which he has oftenest in his mind, which best represent Shelley to him, and which he instinctively reverts to when Shelley's name is mentioned, are some of the shorter poems and detached lyrics. Here Shelley forgets for a while all that ever makes his verse turbid; forgets that he is anything but a poet, forgets sometimes that he is anything but a child; lies back in his skiff, and looks at the clouds. He plays truant from earth, slips through the wicket of fancy into heaven's meadow, and goes gathering stars. Here we have that absolute virgin-gold of song which is the scarcest among human products, and for which we can go to but three poets—Coleridge, Shelley, Chopin,* and perhaps

*Such analogies between masters in sister-arts are often interesting. In some respects, is not Brahms the Browning of music?

we should add Keats:—*Christabel* and *Kubla-Khan; The Skylark*, *The Cloud*, and *The Sensitive Plant* (in its first two parts); *The Eve of Saint Agnes* and *The Nightingale;* certain of the Nocturnes; these things make very quintessentialized loveliness. It is attar of poetry.

Remark, as a thing worth remarking, that, although Shelley's diction is at other times singularly rich, it ceases in these poems to be rich, or to obtrude itself at all; it is imperceptible; his Muse has become a veritable Echo, whose body has dissolved from about her voice. Indeed, when his diction is richest, nevertheless the poetry so dominates the expression that we only feel the latter as an atmosphere until we are satiated with the former; then we discover with surprise to how imperial a vesture we had been blinded by gazing on the face of his song. A lesson, this, deserving to be conned by

a generation so opposite in tendency as our own: a lesson that in poetry, as in the Kingdom of God, we should not take thought too greatly wherewith we shall be clothed, but seek first* the spirit, and all these things will be added unto us.

On the marvellous music of Shelley's verse we need not dwell, except to note that he avoids that metronomic beat of rhythm which Edgar Poe introduced into modern lyric measures, as Pope introduced it into the rhyming heroics of his day. Our varied metres are becoming as painfully over-polished as Pope's one metre. Shelley could at need sacrifice smoothness to fitness. He could write an anapæst that would send Mr Swinburne into strong shudders (e.g., "stream did glide") when he instinctively felt that by so forgoing the more obvious music of melody he

* Seek *first*, not seek *only*.

would better secure the higher music of harmony. If we have to add that in other ways he was far from escaping the defects of his merits, and would sometimes have to acknowledge that his Nilotic flood too often overflowed its banks, what is this but saying that he died young?

It may be thought that in our casual comments on Shelley's life we have been blind to its evil side. That, however, is not the case. We see clearly that he committed grave sins, and one cruel crime; but we remember also that he was an Atheist from his boyhood; we reflect how gross must have been the moral neglect in the training of a child who *could* be an Atheist from his boyhood: and we decline to judge so unhappy a being by the rules which we should apply to a Catholic. It seems to us that Shelley was struggling—

blindly, weakly, stumblingly, but still struggling — towards higher things. His Pantheism is an indication of it. Pantheism is a half-way house, and marks ascent or descent according to the direction from which it is approached. Now Shelley came to it from absolute Atheism; therefore in his case it meant rise. Again, his poetry alone would lead us to the same conclusion, for we do not believe that a truly corrupted spirit can write consistently ethereal poetry. We should believe in nothing, if we believed that, for it would be the consecration of a lie. Poetry is a thermometer: by taking its average height you can estimate the normal temperature of its writer's mind. The devil can do many things. But the devil cannot write poetry. He may mar a poet, but he cannot make a poet. Among all the temptations wherewith he tempted St Anthony,

though we have often seen it stated that he howled, we have never seen it stated that he sang.

Shelley's anarchic principles were as a rule held by him with some misdirected view to truth. He disbelieved in kings. And is it not a mere fact—regret it if you will—that in all European countries, except two, monarchs are a mere survival, the obsolete buttons on the coat-tails of rule, which serve no purpose but to be continually coming off? It is a miserable thing to note how every little Balkan State, having obtained liberty (save the mark!) by Act of Congress, straightway proceeds to secure the service of a professional king. These gentlemen are plentiful in Europe. They are the "noble Chairmen" who lend their names for a consideration to any enterprising company which may be speculating in Liberty. When we see these things, we revert

to the old lines in which Persius tells how you cannot turn Dama into a freeman by twirling him round your finger and calling him Marcus Dama.

Again, Shelley desired a religion of humanity, and that meant, to him, a religion for humanity, a religion which, unlike the spectral Christianity about him, should permeate and regulate the whole organization of men. And the feeling is one with which a Catholic must sympathize, in an age where—if we may say so without irreverence—the Almighty has been made a constitutional Deity, with certain stategrants of worship, but no influence over political affairs. In these matters his aims were generous, if his methods were perniciously mistaken. In his theory of Free Love alone, borrowed like the rest from the Revolution, his aim was as mischievous as his method. At the same time he was at least logi-

cal. His theory was repulsive but comprehensible. Whereas from our present *via media*—facilitation of divorce—can only result the era when the young lady in reduced circumstances will no longer turn governess, but will be open to engagement as wife at a reasonable stipend.

We spoke of the purity of Shelley's poetry. We know of but three passages to which exception can be taken. One is happily hidden under a heap of Shelleian rubbish. Another is offensive because it presents his theory of Free Love in its most odious form. The third is very much a matter, we think, for the individual conscience. Compare with this the genuinely corrupt Byron, through the cracks and fissures of whose heaving versification steam up perpetually the sulphurous vapours from his central iniquity. We cannot credit that any Christian ever had his faith

shaken through reading Shelley, unless his faith were shaken before he read Shelley. Is any safely-havened bark likely to slip its cable, and make for a flag planted on the very reef where the planter himself was wrecked?

Why indeed (one is tempted to ask in concluding) should it be that the poets who have written for us the poetry richest in skiey grain, most free from admixture with the duller things of earth—the Shelleys, the Coleridges, the Keats'—are the very poets whose lives are among the saddest records in literature? Is it that (by some subtile mystery of analogy) sorrow, passion and fantasy are indissolubly connected, like water, fire and cloud; that as from sun and dew are born the vapours, so from fire and tears ascend the "visions of aërial joy"; that the harvest waves richest over the

battlefields of the soul; that the heart, like the earth, smells sweetest after rain; that the spell on which depend such necromantic castles is some spirit of pain charm-poisoned at their base?* Such a poet, it may be, mists with sighs the window of his life until the tears run down it; then some air of searching poetry, like an air of searching frost, turns it to a crystal wonder. The god of golden song is the god, too, of the golden sun; so peradventure songlight is like sunlight, and darkens the countenance of the soul. Perhaps the rays are to the stars what thorns are to the flowers; and so the poet, after wandering over heaven, returns with bleeding feet. Less tragic in its merely temporal aspect than the life of Keats or Coleridge, the life of Shelley in its moral aspect is, perhaps,

* We hope that we need not refer the reader, for the methods of magic architecture, to Ariosto and that Atlas among enchanters, Beckford.

more tragical than that of either; his dying seems a myth, a figure of his living; the material shipwreck a figure of the immaterial.

Enchanted child, born into a world unchildlike; spoiled darling of Nature, playmate of her elemental daughters; "pard-like spirit, beautiful and swift," laired amidst the burning fastnesses of his own fervid mind; bold foot along the verges of precipitous dream; light leaper from crag to crag of inaccessible fancies; towering Genius, whose soul rose like a ladder between heaven and earth with the angels of song ascending and descending it;—he is shrunken into the little vessel of death, and sealed with the unshatterable seal of doom, and cast down deep below the rolling tides of Time. Mighty meat for little guests, when the heart of Shelley was laid in the cemetery of Caius Cestius! Beauty, music, sweetness, tears—the mouth of

the worm has fed of them all. Into that sacred bridal-gloom of death where he holds his nuptials with eternity let not our rash speculations follow him; let us hope rather that as, amidst material nature, where our dull eyes see only ruin, the finer eye of science has discovered life in putridity and vigour in decay, seeing dissolution even and disintegration, which in the mouth of man symbolize disorder, to be in the works of God undeviating order, and the manner of our corruption to be no less wonderful than the manner of our health,—so, amidst the supernatural universe, some tender undreamed surprise of life in doom awaited that wild nature, which, worn by warfare with itself, its Maker, and all the world, now

> Sleeps, and never palates more the dug,
> The beggar's nurse, and Cæsar's.

The universe is his box of toys. He dabbles his fingers in the day-fall. He is gold-dusty with tumbling amid the stars. He makes bright mischief with the moon. The meteors nuzzle their noses in his hand. He teases into growling the kennelled thunder, and laughs at the shaking of its fiery chain. He dances in and out of the gates of heaven: its floor is littered with his broken fancies. He runs wild over the fields of ether. He chases the rolling world.

THE NOTES

FRANCIS THOMPSON wrote the *Shelley* article in the year 1889, when he had but lately ended a long term of alienation from pens and paper. It happened that Bishop (afterwards Cardinal) Vaughan, who knew the Poet's family well in Lancashire, and had known Francis himself at Ushaw College, met him in London; and out of this meeting, and the Bishop's wish to serve him, came the suggestion that he should contribute a paper to *The Dublin Review*. That venerable Quarterly, founded by Cardinal Wiseman half a century before, Bishop Vaughan now owned but did not edit. It inherited ecclesiastical rather than literary traditions; and a due consideration for these dictated the opening passages of the Essay, since somewhat curtailed. Hence proceeded the plea that Theology and Literature might be reconciled—just such another reconciliation as Art had been adjured to seal with Nature at the end of the eighteenth-century:

> Go find her, kiss her, and be friends again!

And Thompson's plea had this added relevance—that the choice of a subject, left to himself, had fallen upon Shelley; per-

haps a dubious choice. At any rate the article was returned to him from *The Dublin*—one more of those memorable rejections that go into the treasury of all neglected writers' consolations, perhaps their illusions. Thrown aside by its discouraged author, the Essay was found among his papers after his death. His Literary Executor thought it right that the *Review* for which it was originally designed should again have the offer of it, since a new generation of readers had arisen, and another editor, in days otherwise regenerate. Thus it happened that this orphan among Essays entered at last on a full inheritance of fame.* Appreciative readers

* It appeared in *The Dublin*, dated July 1908, with the following footnote by the Editor: "The editor thinks that his readers will welcome this very remarkable posthumous essay in the precise form in which it was found among the papers of its author, the late Mr Francis Thompson. It lacks, of course, the author's final revision, and may contain a sentence here or there which Mr Thompson himself would not finally have endorsed without those omissions or qualifying phrases which a writer makes or adds before passing his work for publication. Such modifications cannot, however, be satisfactorily made by another hand, and only obvious corrections necessary for literary reasons have been made by the author's literary executor, Mr Wilfrid Meynell, to whose kindness *The Dublin Review* is indebted for the offer of the article."

rapidly spread its renown beyond their own orthodox ranks; and, for the first time, in a long life of seventy-two years, *The Dublin Review* passed into a Second Edition. That also was soon exhausted; but not the further demand, which this separate issue is designed to meet.*

* A leading article, entitled "Poet to Poet," appearing in *The Observer* (August, 1908), said: "No literary event for years has been so amazing an instance of buried jewels brought to light as the posthumous article by the late Francis Thompson. *The Dublin Review*, even under the admirable editorship of Mr Wilfrid Ward, had remained a comparatively cloistered publication. It has now leaped into a second edition with a memorable masterpiece of English prose. Brilliant, joyous, poignant are these pages of interpretation, as sensitive and magical as the mind of one poet ever lent to the genius of another. Yet when we turn from the subject to think of the author, the thing is as mournful as splendid. As for Francis Thompson, whose existence was as fantastic in the true sense as De Quincey's, and far more sorrowful, it is as though fate, even after death, pursued him with paradoxes. In this part of his fame he has no share, and his finest piece of prose—and much of his prose, though unknown to the world, was notable—sets London ringing in a way that reminds us of music never played until found among the papers of a dead composer. There are doubtless many who still ask 'Who was Francis Thompson?' There are probably many more who, mistaking knowledge of a poet for familiarity with his name, would do well to ask 'Who

THE NOTES

THOUGH Francis Thompson did not live to know that his Essay reached the reader's heart, even as it had reached Shelley's and his own, he nevertheless knew his labour to be not all in vain. He himself quarried in that mine of his own making, and garnished his poetry with some of those "buried jewels" of his prose. In the passage which tells of the Universe as the singer's "box of toys," we recognize the matrix from which he cut a verse in *The Hound of Heaven;* while the closing page of the article lives—or dies—again in the stanzas of *An Anthem of Earth:*

> Ah, Mother, Mother,
> What is this Man, thy darling kissed and cuffed,
> Thou lustingly engender'st,
> To sweat, and make his brag, and rot,
> Crowned with all honour and all shamefulness?

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was Shelley?' The Essay answers both questions equally. As in all the highest work of that kind, its author divines the secrets of another nature by the certainty that his own was akin to it; and sympathy, inspiring true vision, reveals the seer as well as the seen. That the Essay should appear at last, instinct with the first freshness of life—that the expression of the inward glory of a man's youth should become his own rich epitaph—this is perhaps worth all the years of oblivion out of which a masterpiece has been redeemed."

From nightly towers
He dogs the secret footsteps of the heavens,
Sifts in his hands the stars, weighs them as gold-dust,
And yet is he successive unto nothing
But patrimony of a little mould,
And entail of four planks. Thou hast made his mouth
Avid of all dominion and all mightiness,
All sorrow, all delight, all topless grandeurs,
All beauty, and all starry majesties,
And dim transtellar things;—even that it may,
Filled in the ending with a puff of dust,
Confess—"It is enough." The world left empty
What that poor mouthful crams. His heart is builded
For pride, for potency, infinity,
All heights, all deeps, and all immensities,
Arrased with purple like the house of kings,
To stall the grey-rat, and the carrion-worm
Statelily lodge. Mother of mysteries,
Sayer of dark sayings in a thousand tongues,
Who bringest forth no saying yet so dark
As we ourselves, thy darkest!

SHORTLY after he wrote this *Shelley* paper, Francis Thompson set down some "Stray Thoughts on Shelley," not lacking at least a "correlated greatness" in association with the longer composition. Speaking again of the close relation between the poet and the poetry—that "sincere effluence of life" which his own verse ever was—he protests against a writer who had said that Shelley, though himself a wretch, could write as an angel:

"Let me put it nakedly. That if Heliogabalus had possessed Shelley's brain, he might have lived the life of Heliogabalus, and yet have written the poetry of Shelley. To those who believe this, there is nothing to say. I will only remark, in passing, that I take it to be the most Tartarian lie which ever spurted on paper from the pen of a good man. For the writer *was* a good man, and had no idea that he was offering a poniard at the heart of truth."

Again, Francis Thompson says:

"The difference between the true poet in his poetry and in his letters or personal intercourse, is just the difference between two states of the one man; between the metal live from the forge and the metal chill. But, chill or glowing, the metal is equally itself. If difference there be, it is the metal in glow that is the truer to itself. For, cold, it may be overlaid with dirt, obscured with dust; but afire, all these are scorched away."

THE last of these "Stray Thoughts" carries Shelley with them into the far possibilities of an environment other than that which was his own:

"The coupling of the names of two English poets [Keats and Shelley] who have possessed in largest measure that frail might of sensibility suggests another problem which I should like to put forward, though I cannot answer. What may be the effect of scenic and climatic surroundings on the character and development of genius such as theirs? Had he drunk from the cup of Italy before, not after, the cup of death, how would it have wrought on the passionate sensitiveness of Keats? Would his poetry have changed in kind or power? Cooped in an English city, what would have betided the dewy sensitiveness of Shelley? Could he have created *The Revolt of Islam* had he not risen warm from the lap of the poets' land? Could he have waxed inebriate with the heady choruses of *Prometheus Unbound*,

> Like tipsy Joy, that reels with tossing head,

if for the Baths of Caracalla with their 'flowering ruins,' the Italian spring and 'the new life with which it drenches the spirits even to intoxication,' had been substituted the blear streets of London, the Avernian birds, the anæmic herbage of our parks, the snivel of our catarrhal May, and

the worthless I O U which a sharping English spring annually presents to its confiding creditors? Climate and surroundings must needs influence vital energy; and upon the storage of this fuel, which the imaginative worker burns at a fiercer heat than other workers, depends a poet's sustained power. With waning health, the beauty of Keats's poetry distinctly waned. Nor can it be, but that beings of such susceptibility as these two should transmute their colour, like the Ceylonese lizard, with the shifting colour of their shifted station. I have fancied, at times, a degree of analogy between the wandering sheep Shelley and the Beloved Disciple. Both are usually represented with a certain feminine beauty. Both made the constant burden of their teaching, 'My little children, love one another.' Both have similarities in their cast of genius. The Son of Man walks amidst the golden candlesticks almost as the profane poet would have seen Him walk:

> His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire; and His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and His voice as the sound of many waters.

"Receive from Shelley, out of many kindred phantasies, this:

White
Its countenance, like the whiteness of bright snow. . . .
Its hair is white, the brightness of white light
Scatter'd in string.

"And, finally, with somewhat the same large elemental vision they take each their stand; leaning athwart the rampires of creation to watch the bursting of over-seeded worlds, and the mown stars falling behind Time, the scytheman, in broad swaths along the Milky Way. Now, it is shown that the inspired revelations of the inspired Evangelist are tinged with imagery by the scenery of Patmos. If, instead of looking from Patmos into the eyes of Nature, he had been girt within the walls of a Roman dungeon, might not his eagle have mewed a feather? We should have had great Apocalyptic prophecy; should we have had the great Apocalyptic poem? For the poetical greatness of a Biblical book has no necessary commensuration with its religious importance; Job is greater than Isaiah. Might even St John have sung less highly, though not less truly, from out the glooms of the Tullianum? Perhaps so

it is; and, perhaps, one* who hymned the angel Israfel spoke wider truth than he knew:

> The ecstasies above
> With thy burning measures suit—
> Thy grief, thy joy, thy hate, thy love,
> With the fervour of thy lute—
> Well may the stars be mute!
>
> Yes, Heaven is thine; but this
> Is a world of sweets and sours;
> Our flowers are merely—flowers,
> And the shadow of thy perfect bliss
> Is the sunshine of ours.
>
> If I could dwell
> Where Israfel
> Hath dwelt, and he where I,
> He might not sing so wildly well
> A mortal melody,
> While a bolder note than his might swell
> From my lyre within the sky."

* E. A. Poe.

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BY FRANCIS THOMPSON

POEMS.

PROFOUND thought and far-fetched splendour of imagery—qualities which ought to place him in the permanent ranks of fame.—COVENTRY PATMORE.

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THE winter's labour [writes LADY BURNE-JONES of her Husband in the year 1893] was cheered by the appearance of a small volume of poems by an author whose name was till then unknown to us. The little book moved him to admiration and hope; and, speaking of the poem he liked best in it, he said: "Since Gabriel's *Blessed Damozel* no mystical words have so touched me as *The Hound of Heaven*. Shall I ever forget how I undressed and dressed again, and had to undress again—a thing I most hate—because I could think of nothing else?"—*Memorials of* EDWARD BURNE-JONES.

IS there any religious poem carrying so much of the passion of penitence since George Herbert wrote *The Flower* and *The Collar?* And these are short lyrics, and simple in expression, while *The Hound of Heaven* is an Ode in the manner of Crashaw. With Crashaw, indeed, we cannot avoid comparing it, and in the comparison it more than holds its own.—*The Spectator.*

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SISTER SONGS.

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